United Nations A/66/763

General Assembly

Distr.: General
5 April 2012

Original: English

Sixty-sixth session
Agenda items 14 and 117

Integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields

Follow-up to the outcome of the Millennium Summit

Follow-up to General Assembly resolution 64/291 on human security

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/291, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on the notion of human security, including a possible definition thereof, and to submit a report to the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. In accordance with that resolution, Governments of all Member States were invited to provide their views through written submissions and informal consultations with the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Human Security. Based on contributions from Member States, the report provides a summary of discussions on human security at the General Assembly; outlines key aspects towards forming a common understanding on the notion of human security; suggests a common understanding on human security, based on the views expressed by Member States; and considers areas where the application of human security can bring added value to the work of the Organization. The report closes with a set of recommendations for the consideration of Member States.

12-28537 (E) 270412

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/291 entitled "Follow-up to paragraph 143 on human security of the 2005 World Summit Outcome". In that resolution, the Assembly took note of the ongoing efforts to define the notion of human security, and recognized the need to continue the discussions and to achieve an agreement on the definition of human security in the General Assembly. In paragraph 3 of the resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member States on the notion of human security, including a possible definition thereof, and to submit a report to the Assembly at its sixty-sixth session. The present report considers the course of the discussions on human security within the General Assembly and is based on the views expressed and contributions submitted by Member States pursuant to Assembly resolution 64/291.[1]

2. Human security, as outlined in my report contained in document A/64/701, is based on the fundamental understanding that Governments retain the primary role for ensuring the survival, livelihood and dignity of their citizens. It is an invaluable tool for assisting Governments in identifying widespread and cross-cutting threats to the prosperity of their people and the stability of their sovereignty. It advances policies and programmes that counter and address current and emerging threats in a manner that is contextually relevant and prioritized. This helps Governments and the international community to better utilize their resources and to develop strategies that strengthen the protection and empowerment framework needed for the assurance of human security and the promotion of peace and stability at every level: local, national, regional and international.

3. Moreover, in an increasingly interconnected world, where threats can potentially spread rapidly within and across countries, the application of human security highlights the interface between security, development and human rights, and recognizes the profound interlinkages among these three pillars of the United Nations system. By identifying how current and emerging threats can translate into broader insecurities, human security calls for comprehensive, people-centred, context-specific and prevention-oriented actions that help to improve the capacities of Governments and people to provide early warning, identify root causes and address policy gaps with regard to current and emerging challenges. Together, these actions aim to advance freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity for all.

[1] Member States were invited to submit written inputs on the notion of human security and the areas where the human security approach could bring added value to the work of the United Nations. Written contributions were received from Costa Rica, Cuba, Egypt, Iraq, Japan, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), the Human Security Network (on behalf of Austria, Chile, Costa Rica, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland and Thailand, and South Africa as an observer) and the Pacific small island developing States (on behalf of Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu). In addition, five informal consultations on human security were held from 14 to 16 November 2011 with groups of Member States, including the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the Group of African States, the Human Security Network, the Friends of Human Security and the European Union.

4. Building upon the commitment by Member States to further discuss and define the notion of human security in the General Assembly, the present report:

(a) Provides a summary of discussions on human security at the General Assembly and underlines the main points articulated by Member States at these meetings;

(b) Outlines key aspects towards forming a common understanding on the notion of human security;

(c) Suggests a common understanding on human security, based on the views expressed by Member States;

(d) Considers areas where the application of human security can bring added value to the work of the Organization.

The report closes with a set of recommendations for the consideration of Member States.

II. Course of discussions on human security in the General Assembly

5. The 2005 World Summit and the decision by the General Assembly to further define the notion of human security have been critical in raising awareness and interest in the notion of human security. In paragraph 143 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1), the Heads of State and Government stressed "the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair", and recognized that "all individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential". To that end, the Heads of State and Government committed themselves "to discussing and defining the notion of human security in the General Assembly".

6. As a follow-up to the commitment expressed by Member States in 2005, the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-second session, Srgjan Kerim, convened an informal thematic debate on human security on 22 May 2008. The debate focused on the notion of human security, its multidimensional scope and its added value to the work of the United Nations.

7. During the course of the deliberations at the thematic debate, a broad consensus was reached by Member States on the need for a new culture of international relations that goes beyond fragmented responses and calls for comprehensive, integrated and people-centred strategies to current and emerging threats. Furthermore, human security was seen by Member States as a means to help limit the recurrence of threats and prevent their expansion into broader and more intractable crises.

8. In that regard, it was recognized that human security provides a significant opportunity for the United Nations to develop harmonized, collaborative and efficient responses that bring together the relevant components of the work of the Organization. Member States also reiterated the need to ensure that the application of human security is in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, is delinked from the responsibility to protect, and is implemented with a view to

enhancing the capacities of Governments and people to address current and emerging threats, with full respect for national sovereignty.

9. To continue the discussions on the notion of human security, on 20 and 21 May 2010 the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fourth session, Ali Abdussalam Treki, convened a panel discussion on the theme "People-centred responses: the added value of human security" and a plenary meeting of the Assembly to consider the report of the Secretary-General on human security (A/64/701).

10. At the plenary meeting, Member States highlighted the multidimensional aspects of the threats facing humanity today. Furthermore, it was noted that the application of human security strengthens national sovereignty by providing Governments with effective tools to examine the root causes of threats and by promoting responses that build on the capacities of local and national institutions. In addition, a number of Member States supported the view that the application of human security does not bring additional layers to the work of the United Nations, but complements and further focuses the activities of the Organization in a more effective, efficient and prevention-oriented manner.

11. Member States also emphasized the need to ensure that the understanding of human security is based on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. Lastly, the complementary relationship between human security and national sovereignty and the distinction between human security and the responsibility to protect were reiterated by a number of Member States.

12. Recalling the commitment made by the General Assembly in its resolution 64/291, the second informal thematic debate on human security was convened on 14 April 2011 by the President of the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session, Joseph Deiss. While the need for continued consultation was emphasized, inputs by Member States nevertheless confirmed the emergence of a level of consensus by which the notion of human security could be framed.

13. In particular, Member States understood the notion of human security to encompass a people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented framework through which national capacities could be strengthened. In addition, a number of Member States saw the added value of human security in compelling policymakers and practitioners to focus on the real needs and the multidimensional insecurities facing people today. As a result, a number of Member States considered that human security provided an important lens through which the United Nations can better address the interface between security, development and human rights in its activities.

14. In addition, to avoid potential misinterpretation or misuse of the notion, several Member States emphasized the need to define and establish a clear understanding of human security where the use of force is not envisaged in its implementation, the principles of the Charter are fully respected and human security contributes to, and does not duplicate or take away from, existing efforts by the United Nations system. Furthermore, it was recognized that assigning a legal definition to human security would be counterproductive since the notion is both an operational and a policy framework. Finally, it was generally noted that human

security should be implemented on the basis of a common understanding as agreed upon by Member States.

15. More recently, Member States were invited to submit written submissions pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/291. These submissions, together with a series of informal consultations convened in mid-November 2011 by the Special Adviser on Human Security, aimed (a) to achieve a common understanding on the notion of human security, and (b) to discuss the areas of United Nations activities where the human security approach could be useful to the work of the Organization. Sections III to VI below provide further clarification on key aspects towards forming a common understanding on the notion of human security and are based on the written submissions by Member States, the informal consultations held in November 2011 and prior discussions at the General Assembly on human security.

III. Defining the core values of human security and the reasons for their importance

16. In responding to complex and multidimensional insecurities facing people in today's interconnected world, the Heads of State and Government recognized in paragraph 143 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome "the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair ... with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential." That paragraph and the discussions by Member States since 2005 have resulted in a convergence of views on many aspects of the notion of human security.

17. First, human security aims at ensuring the survival, livelihood and dignity of people in response to current and emerging threats — threats that are widespread and cross cutting. Such threats are not limited to those living in absolute poverty or conflict. As evidenced by the recent earthquake and tsunami in east Japan and the financial and economic challenges in Europe and the United States of America, today, people throughout the world, in developing and developed countries alike, live under varied conditions of insecurity. These threats seriously challenge both Governments and people, and call for a rethinking of security where the protection and empowerment of individuals form the basis for achieving stability, development and human progress.

18. Second, human security underscores the universality and interdependence of a set of freedoms that are fundamental to human life: freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity. As a result, human security emphasizes the interlinkages between security, development and human rights and considers these to be the building blocks of human and, therefore, national security.

19. Third, human security is guided by the principles of the Charter and does not replace State security. On the contrary, human security and State security are mutually dependent and complementary. Without human security, State security cannot be attained and vice versa.

20. Fourth, since the causes and manifestations of human insecurity vary considerably across countries and communities, human security strengthens the development of solutions that are embedded in local realities and are based on national ownership. As such, human security enhances the capacities of

Governments and people to develop their potential and to live in dignity, free from poverty and despair.

21. Finally, human security provides a dynamic framework that links the three pillars of the United Nations system and promotes the establishment of synergies and partnerships that capitalize on the comparative advantages of a diverse network of stakeholders, including Governments, regional and international organizations, local populations and civil society. This ensures coherence, eliminates duplication and advances integrated responses that together can yield much greater force.

IV. Scope of the notion of human security

22. Human security does not entail the threat or the use of force and is implemented with full respect for the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including full respect for sovereignty of States, territorial integrity and non-interference in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of States.

23. As articulated in my previous report (A/64/701) and noted in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the notion of human security is distinct from the responsibility to protect and its implementation. While human security is in response to multidimensional insecurities facing people, the responsibility to protect focuses on protecting populations from specific cases of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. As such, human security has broader application, bringing together the three pillars of the United Nations system, whereas the responsibility to protect centres on the aforementioned situations.

24. Specifically, human security focuses on widespread and cross-cutting threats to people's survival, livelihood and dignity, in particular, the most vulnerable. Accordingly, human security draws attention to the root causes behind those threats (whether internal or external); considers the impact of those threats on freedoms that are fundamental to human life (freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity); and highlights the actual needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of Governments and people.

25. Improvements in the capacities of Governments and people to respond to widespread and cross-cutting threats not only help to mitigate the impact of the threats but also reduce their expansion into broader and more intractable crises. At the same time, human security acknowledges that some threats are beyond the control of Governments and people and require inclusive systems of global governance that unite efforts and promote greater international collaboration.

26. By underscoring the primacy and the universality of a set of freedoms that are fundamental to human life, human security makes no distinction between civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and as a result addresses threats to the survival, livelihood and dignity of people in a multidimensional and comprehensive manner. Accordingly, human security recognizes that the attainment of peace, development and human rights requires a comprehensive approach where the interlinkages and the triangular relationship between security, development and human rights are acknowledged.

27. Lastly, conditions for human security vary significantly across and within countries, as well as at different points in time. Both the causes and manifestations

of threats and their impact on people depend on a complex interaction of local, national, regional and international factors. Therefore, human security calls for solutions that are contextualized and responsive to the particular situations they seek to address. In some instances, threats acquire transnational dimensions that go beyond the capacities of individual Governments or regions, thereby requiring collaborative responses.

V. The human security approach

28. Human security is a dynamic and practical policy framework for addressing widespread and cross-cutting threats facing Governments and people. Recognizing that threats to human security vary considerably across countries and communities and at different points in time, the application of human security calls for an assessment of human insecurities that is both comprehensive and contextually relevant. Such an approach helps to focus attention on current and emerging threats to the security and well-being of individuals and communities.

29. Furthermore, by identifying the concrete needs of populations under stress, human security directly and positively affects the daily lives of people threatened in their survival, livelihood and dignity. As a result, the advancement of human security gives rise to more immediate and tangible results that comprehensively address the root causes behind the threats; identifies priorities based on the actual needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of Governments and people; and reveals possible mismatches between domestic, regional and international policies and responses. The combination of these elements helps to strengthen actions taken by Governments and other actors in support of human security.

30. The application of human security derives much of its strength from a dual policy framework that rests upon the mutually reinforcing pillars of protection and empowerment. Application of this framework offers a comprehensive approach that combines top-down norms, processes and institutions, including the establishment of early warning mechanisms, good governance and social protection instruments, with a bottom-up focus, in which participatory processes support the important role of people as actors in defining and implementing their essential freedoms.

31. Furthermore, by integrating the responses of relevant actors in a more coherent and efficient manner, human security builds upon the existing capacities of Governments and people through integrated and comprehensive responses that capitalize on the comparative advantages of a wide range of actors. This ensures coherence in the allocation of resources, goals and responsibilities across and among actors at the local, national, regional and international levels, thereby eliminating duplication and advancing targeted, coordinated and cost-effective responses that bring together the different components of human security.

32. Finally, human security is best safeguarded through proactive and preventive actions to current and emerging threats. By examining how the particular constellations of threats to individuals and communities can translate into broader insecurities, human security promotes the development of early warning mechanisms that help to mitigate the impact of current threats and, where possible, prevent the occurrence of future threats.

VI. Actors responsible for promoting human security

33. Governments retain the primary role for ensuring the survival, livelihood and dignity of their populations. At the same time, the crises of recent years have sharpened the focus of the international community on those threats that are beyond the control of any individual Government or Governments. These threats have highlighted the need for greater collaboration among Governments, international and regional organizations and civil society and co mmunity-based actors.

34. Actors, particularly those close to and familiar with the realities on the ground, are especially important in building responses that are proactive, preventive and sustainable, and they should be assisted by the international community. Moreover, regional and subregional organizations play a critical role in mobilizing support and advancing collective action. With knowledge of the political nuances and cultural sensitivities of their regions, these organizations are crucial partners in promoting human security.

35. The United Nations system is also instrumental in the application of human security. With a mandate to address security, development and human rights, the application of human security builds upon the expertise of the different parts of the system and does not bring additional layers to the work of the United Nations. This will help advance the "One United Nations" reform agenda and support the commitment made by Member States to move from a culture of reaction to one of prevention.

VII. Common understanding on human security

36. Guided by paragraph 143 of the 2005 World Outcome Document and the views expressed by Member States, as well as building upon the core values, the scope and the approach of human security as described in the previous sections, a common understanding on human security is outlined as follows for the consideration of Member States:

(a) Human security upholds the right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential;

(b) The notion of human security is distinct from the responsibility to protect and its implementation;

(c) Human security does not entail the threat or the use of force and is implemented with full respect for the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including the full respect for sovereignty of States, territorial integrity and non-interference in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of States. Human security does not entail additional legal obligations on the part of States;

(d) Human security does not replace State security. They are mutually dependent upon each other;

(e) Human security aims at ensuring the survival, livelihood and dignity of all individuals, particularly those most vulnerable to current and emerging threats — threats that are widespread and cross cutting;

(f) Human security underscores the universality of a set of freedoms that are fundamental to human life (freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom to live in dignity). These freedoms are applicable to all people living under varied conditions of insecurity in developing and developed countries alike;

(g) Human security recognizes the interlinkages between peace, development and human rights, and equally considers civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Thus, human security addresses threats to the survival, livelihood and dignity of people in a multidimensional and comprehensive manner;

(h) Human security calls for people-centred, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of individuals and their communities;

(i) Human security is best realized through proactive actions that help to mitigate the impact of current threats and, where possible, prevent the occurrence of future threats;

(j) Human security strengthens solutions that are embedded in local realities and are based on national ownership. Since the political, economic, social and cultural conditions for human security vary significantly across and within countries, and at different points in time, the advancement of human security recognizes these differences and promotes responses that are nationally driven and give rise to more immediate and tangible benefits to people and Governments;

(k) Governments retain the primary role for ensuring the survival, livelihood and dignity of their citizens. The responsibility of the international community is to complement and provide the necessary support to Governments, upon their request, so as to strengthen their capacities to respond to current and emerging threats;

(l) Human security is a dynamic and practical policy framework to address widespread and cross-cutting threats in a coherent and comprehensive manner through greater collaboration and partnership among Governments, international and regional organizations and civil society and community-based actors.

VIII. Areas of United Nations activities where a human security approach can be useful to the work of the Organization

37. Based on written inputs and consultations with Member States, the thematic areas presented in the following subsections do not represent all the areas or priorities in which the human security approach could be applied, nor do they provide an exhaustive analysis of the selected themes. Rather, each thematic subsection highlights some areas where human security can bring particular added value to the work of the Organization.

A. Climate change and climate-related hazard events

38. Member States have overwhelmingly highlighted the relevance of the human security approach to addressing the interaction of climate change with other insecurities. Climatic fluctuations and extreme weather patterns disrupt harvests, deplete fisheries, erode livelihoods and increase the spread of infectious diseases. Meanwhile, the convergence of climate change with demographic trends, rapid urbanization and increased competition over dwindling water and natural resources can result in social stresses with far-reaching implications for national, regional and international stability. Moreover, in certain cases, rising sea levels threaten the survival, livelihood and dignity of people and their national sovereignty. Because the human consequences of climate change are multiple and often devastating in nature, a comprehensive and integrated approach that helps to reduce the social, political, economic and environmental consequences of climate change is an urgent priority.

39. While political commitment and international cooperation remain critical to our efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the importance of mainstreaming disaster reduction and risk management into national development plans, promoting community-based adaptation and mitigation plans, and accelerating the transfer and deployment of information and technologies to those most vulnerable to climate change is unabated and remains an integral part of the United Nations activities. It is in this regard that I believe that the human security approach can contribute significantly to our efforts.

40. By focusing attention on the combined risks of climate-related threats, the human security approach highlights the interconnectedness and the cross-sectoral consequences of climate change and its impact on the different domains of human security. Such an analysis will not only improve and expand the required information on the level, trend and distribution of risks and vulnerabilities across and within countries, but it will also help to assess regularly the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of people and communities at the national and subnational levels. Subsequently, evidence-based protection and empowerment strategies can be developed to expand people's welfare and ensure their sustainability. The combination of these measures can result in improved early warning systems, more resilient coping mechanisms and better tailored adaptation strategies to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of the people on the ground. Taken together, they can help to reduce the human, economic and social costs of disasters.

41. As both a development and an environmental concern, the consequences of climate change and climate-related hazard events underscore the need for comprehensive solutions that ensure coherence, improve local capacities and sustain political commitment to provide the necessary assistance to address the risks associated with climate change and climate-related disasters.

B. Post-conflict peacebuilding

42. The past two decades have seen important reforms in the peacebuilding architecture. In many ways, these reforms have been successful; wars between States are far less common than they were in the past and promising initiatives are

helping to rebuild countries in the aftermath of conflicts. Yet more than 1.5 billion people continue to live in fragile and conflict-affected countries, where low-intensity conflict, violent organized crime and underdevelopment shape the post-conflict terrain and threaten to reverse the combined gains of our efforts.[2] As emphasized in my report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict (A/63/881-S/2009/304), we must seize the window of opportunity offered in post-conflict periods to provide basic security, bolster the rule of law, deliver peace dividends, build confidence in political processes and strengthen national capacities for sustainable peace and development.

43. Peacebuilding is a complex process however. In the aftermath of conflicts, peace is often very fragile and the needs of people are far greater than the capacities available. Despite these challenges, post-conflict situations provide significant opportunities to address the root causes of conflicts, heal fragmentations, diminish inequalities and strengthen State-society relations. In this critical and fragile period, people's rights to civil, political, economic, social and cultural freedoms must be protected in order to help societies recover from the aftermath of conflicts.

44. It is in this context that the human security approach can bring much added value to the work of the Organization. Through a people-centred assessment of the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of individuals and communities, national efforts to build and consolidate peace at the community level are placed at the forefront of policymaking. As highlighted in the independent report of the Senior Advisory Group on civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict (A/65/747-S/2011/85), the journey from war to sustainable peace is not possible in the absence of individual, institutional and societal capacities. Almost every conflict-affected country, however devastated, has some of the needed capacities to build a more resilient society. The challenge is to build genuine partnerships that strengthen coexistence and reconciliation, improve public safety, re-establish the rule of law, revitalize the economy and restore basic services to all segments of the population, in particular those most affected by the conflict.

45. With a strong focus on the protection and empowerment framework, the application of human security underlines the inclusion of protection efforts to, inter alia, provide public safety, deliver essential basic services and strengthen the rule of law. Since conflicts erode trust among communities, protection strategies are most effective when they are complemented with empowerment measures that promote partnerships with local stakeholders. Local partners can play a significant role in reinforcing ownership in the future of the country, nurturing reconciliation and coexistence and restoring trust in the institutions that return stability to post-conflict situations. The combined impact of these measures can mobilize and promote civil society, develop early warning systems, provide mediation and reconciliation services and advance inclusive practices, including gender mainstreaming, that together minimize the space in which societies may relapse into conflicts.

46. Finally, by promoting a comprehensive and context-specific approach, the application of human security can help to ensure that support from across the United Nations system is based on the actual realities on the ground. This results in a response framework in which the needs, vulnerabilities and capacity gaps of

[2] *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security, and Development* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2011).

conflict-affected countries are continually assessed and where actions that address these gaps are supported by a peacebuilding architecture that strengthens local and national capacities.

C. Global financial and economic crisis and the Millennium Development Goals

47. The recent global financial and economic crisis is recognized as one of the most severe and synchronized economic downturns experienced in the past 70 years. The reduction in employment and income opportunities, lower trade in goods and services and a dramatic drop in remittances have resulted in further setbacks in our efforts to reduce poverty for millions of people around the world, including our efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Despite concerted and coordinated responses by Member States, multilateral institutions and regional bodies, the impact of the global financial and economic crisis has threatened the capacity of many Governments to respond to the economic and social needs of their populations.

48. Global recessions generate insecurities in all countries, including prosperous ones. However, the depth, severity and impact of global recessions vary significantly between regions, countries and population groups. At the national level, vulnerabilities to the negative impacts of financial and economic shocks differ considerably depending on the level of openness and the financial integration of a given country, its dependency on international aid and remittances, the level of its debt burden, its economic and trade structures and the social protection systems available.

49. Previous economic and financial crises have shown that in the absence of appropriate countercyclical macroeconomic policy measures, as well as supportive and inclusive social protection systems, these crises can have severe negative consequences in terms of additional unemployment and food, health and environmental insecurities. In particular, those who are already poor, including women and children, marginalized groups, migrant workers and workers in the informal economy, are especially vulnerable to the multiple impacts of financial and economic shocks. Often lacking adequate social protection, the need for basic services confront these groups and their Governments precisely at a time when their ability to respond is severely limited. In addition, without adequate safety nets or inclusive social policies, coping mechanisms such as the removal of children from school and a reduction in food intake, can have long-term and possibly intergenerational consequences on the overall well-being and the resilience of the most vulnerable people and countries.

50. Addressing the multidimensional effects of the recent global financial and economic crisis and meeting the Millennium Development Goal targets requires our continued commitment to advance responses that bring together the expertise of different organizations of the United Nations system and their partners. However, a coordinated response by itself is not enough. To be more effective, the response would greatly benefit from a protection and empowerment framework that strengthens human security and minimizes the negative long-term consequences of financial and economic downturns.

51. Therefore, in addition to improved early warning systems and adequate emergency lending mechanisms, a better understanding of the differential impact of these crises on groups, particularly women, and areas within countries is urgently needed. Such an analysis will not only result in more targeted and tangible improvements to the well-being of those most at risk, but it will also limit the negative impacts of these crises on the economic, social and political stability of countries. Furthermore, by identifying the different ways in which these crises increase vulnerabilities in other areas, such as employment, food, health and the environment, the application of the human security approach helps to limit the convergence of these vulnerabilities, which, if neglected, could have dire consequences on the welfare of millions of people and their trust in the institutions of governance at all levels.

D. Health and related challenges

52. There has been unprecedented achievement towards improving global health over the past 20 years. Through improved monitoring of and response mechanisms for global health pandemics, health-related deaths have continued to decline. Despite our progress, however, health-related targets of the Millennium Development Goals are far from achieved. In addition, disparities between and within countries remain, and efforts to improve health and the provision of health care fail to reach the most vulnerable people within populations.

53. Improvements in health are not only dependent on our continued commitment to enhance the availability of health care and to strengthen our disease prevention systems, they are also shaped by social, economic and environmental conditions, which, if not addressed, can impede our progress in this pivotal area. In some regions, poverty, inadequate housing and poor environmental conditions may be the major contributing factors to ill health. Meanwhile, in other regions violent crime and domestic and sexual abuse are the main threats to improvements in health. Moreover, shocks or sudden events such as natural disasters or economic downturns can devastate health-care systems and further deteriorate the health status of the most vulnerable.

54. Therefore, in order to achieve the health-related Millennium Development Goals, as well as to reduce the global burden of diseases, it is crucial to consider health within its broader social, economic and environmental context. While disease-specific approaches are required, they also need to be complemented with comprehensive strategies. By promoting such multidimensional analysis, the human security approach highlights the specific cluster of factors that contribute to ill-health and hinder improvements in the overall health situation in a particular setting. Such an understanding helps to strengthen the development of integrated responses across sectors, and capitalizes on the comparative advantages of different actors. This approach complements our efforts to advance more targeted, efficient and cost-effective responses to meet the health-related Millennium Development Goal targets.

55. Moreover, past efforts have demonstrated that success depends on implementing comprehensive protection and empowerment strategies. Protection measures aim at preventing, monitoring and anticipating health-related threats. They entail developing early warning and response mechanisms, as well as strengthening

preparedness to identify, validate and control health-related challenges. Meanwhile, empowerment measures rely on improving health-care systems, training health professionals, educating and mobilizing the public and developing local-level health insurance schemes that reach the most vulnerable within populations. Such a comprehensive framework improves preparedness for current and emerging health-related challenges and extends our progress in the provision of affordable, functioning and accessible health care, both of which are instrumental to long-term prosperity and development.

IX. Activities of the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security

56. Through its support to over 200 projects in 70 countries, including regional projects, the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security has played an important role in translating the human security approach into practical actions that have helped to strengthen the human security of the most vulnerable communities and people around the world.

57. With the consent of Governments and through their engagement and that of local counterparts, projects funded through the Trust Fund for Human Security have brought together the combined expertise of the United Nations system and have allowed United Nations implementing organizations to tackle widespread and cross-cutting threats affecting people in all regions. In particular, projects funded from the Trust Fund have provided examples of successful multi-stakeholder collaborations that complement the efforts of Governments to address the needs and vulnerabilities of local communities; highlight the institutional gaps that hinder appropriate responses to complex insecurities; and support empowerment and capacity-building measures that result in notable increases in the human security of the most vulnerable communities and people.

58. The selection of projects depends on whether they can provide concrete and sustainable benefits to people and communities threatened in terms of their survival, livelihood and dignity. Other criteria include the ability of the projects to advance an appropriately multisectoral response that is contextually relevant, people-centred and prevention-oriented; to promote partnerships with national authorities and local counterparts in the design and implementation of projects; and to combine the necessary protection and empowerment measures that can ensure local ownership and sustainability.

59. To date, projects have succeeded in rebuilding war-torn communities; protecting people exposed to extreme poverty, sudden economic downturns and natural disasters; and addressing urban violence. Others have responded to complex issues such as trafficking in persons, arms and illicit substances; fostering coexistence and mutual respect within and across communities; and tackling the interconnected human security challenges in isolated communities.

60. The methodology and lessons learned through human security projects can provide valuable tools for assessing and responding to current and emerging threats at the national and subnational levels.

X. Conclusion and recommendations

61. Since the World Summit in 2005, contributions by Member States to discussions on human security have been instrumental in forging a common understanding on human security. As illustrated in the present report, the application of human security supports the implementation of our key priorities for the twenty-first century.

62. By connecting the dots and by focusing our attention on preventive actions, the mainstreaming of human security in the activities of the United Nations can help to reduce the human, financial and environmental cost of today's multiple and complex challenges.

63. The General Assembly is therefore requested:

(a) To consider the present report and agree upon a common understanding on human security as outlined in section VII;

(b) To support the application of human security in the work of the Organization and to discuss with the different entities of the United Nations system on how best to apply human security in United Nations activities;

(c) To take note of the lessons learned from project activities funded by the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security and to expand the application of human security to the national and subnational levels;

(d) To encourage Member States to give financial support to the valuable work of the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security;

(e) To invite the Secretary-General to report on progress in applying human security in United Nations activities and the lessons learned in its application at the national and subnational levels to the General Assembly every two years.